



# EXPLORING THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES USED IN THE SELECTED FICTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This study has been undertaken to investigate the narrative techniques used in the selected works as follows. The works are "How to save a life" by Sara Zarr, "Diary of the Wimpy Kid" by Jeff Kinny and "Three Mistakes of Life" by Chetan Bhagat. In the last few years, narrative research has extended its scope beyond the theoretical question 'What is narrative?' and integrated the leading theoretical debates.

**KEYWORDS:** Narrative Techniques, narratology, narrative voices, point of view

## I. NARRATIVE –AN INTRODUCTION

Narrative is all around us. They are not just in the novel or in the historical writing. When we speak about narrative today, we inevitably associate it with the literary type of narrative the novel or short story. Narrative is associated above all with the act of narration and is to be found wherever someone tells us about something. For example a newsreader on a radio or television, a lecturer in class, a fellow passenger at train, a school friend in the playground, a preacher's priest or the narrator in the novel that we enjoy before going to bed. Actually we all are narrators in our daily life. On occasion, we take the role of a narrator like when we read stories to small children. Narrating is therefore a widespread and often unconscious spoken language activity which can be seen to include a number of different text-types in addition to what we often think of as the proto-typical kind of narrative, namely narrative as an art form.

A narrative is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions. Narratives are a universal phenomenon occurring in all cultures across all periods of history. We tell stories about a series of linked events and it is here where narrative offers a way of organising and understanding these events. It allows us to impose a pattern and order that real life lacks. Narrative refers not so much to the events in a story but is more concerned with the way in which those events are revealed to us –the order in which events are sequenced and the devices are used to relay that information.

The narrative modes a book provides allow his/her reader to pick up pace in the habit of reading books. Books inspire a lot through its narrative techniques. I personally got influenced by the different narrative modes and techniques that the books offered. This is the primary reason for me to select this topic

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In the last few years, narrative research has extended its scope beyond the theoretical question ‘What is narrative?’ and integrated the leading theoretical debates (from feminism to post-structuralism) that originated in the United States. Although in the past two decades narratology has often been declared dead, at the moment there appears to exist a veritable boom, as reflected in the number of recent monographs on narratological subjects and the popularity of the annual conference of the Society for the Study of Narrative Literature (SSNL). Ohio State University Press is publishing an extremely successful series on the theory and interpretation of narrative.

## NARRATIVE THEORY

Narrative theory- which is widely accepted under the term narratology deals with the study of narrative as a genre. Its objective is to describe the constants, variables and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies). Narrative explores the conventions of genre, character, form and time. We must be clear with the plot and the story because if the story is presented as it is the pleasure of reading won't have much effect on readers. Here gives hand is the plot which is a sequence of events edited, ordered and presented to us as narrative

## II. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES ANALYSED IN SELECTED FICTIONS

### 2.1 Selected fiction no. 01. How to save life by Sara Zarr

Narrative point of view (focalisation ):

How to save a life is a multi-layered complex story of life and death written in first person narrative. This contemporary fiction was written in first person narrative technique but not the one as used in the usual fictions. Here the fiction is drafted in dual first person narrative way. There are two dominating narrators in the story narrating the story in their point of view. The major plot is the dilemma in two women's life, needing reasonable solutions and so much hope and faith in the midst of sadness. This stand-alone novel narrates the two worlds of two women in di perspectives (Jill and Mandy). Mandy is pregnant and wants a better life for her baby away in an open adoption so that she can still be a part of the baby's life in the future. Whereas simultaneously in Jill Macsweeney's life she had lost her father a few months back and he was her best friend and main supporter and they shared everything. Ever since then, Jill has been feeling like she lost her self somewhere in the past. All her relationships are stained and she is also furious about the whole adopting idea of her mother. Both the narrators are true to themselves in the narration. The dual narration don't seems hard to follow rather makes us more observant on the whole situation and the psychology of the two young girls.

Dual Narration:

How to save a life has a single plot in dual narration in first person point of view. Jill the first narrator of the fiction expresses her views and develops us the story. Initially it seems as Jill's book because of her narration and being open in her aggression, in her distance from everybody she loves or cares for. From Jill's perspective it is clear that love is not enough when you don't know the path ahead of you. Her narrative is full of suffocating grief but also full of regret. For example Jill says,

We were the same that way. Are. Were. He was, I am. When he was here, I knew who I was. If I forgot, he'd remind me. In theory, I should be the same person now I was then. He died, not me

(How to save a life, pg.3)

Mandy on the other hand was a mystery to start with. Her narration is full of weird awkwardness, that lack of something becomes increasingly distressing when the story progresses and she reveals more of

herself. From Mandy's perspective a little bit of love, as little as a friendly hug, is enough to change a person's entire world. Mandy says

I closed my eyes so I couldn't see them seeing me. . . .

My mother says I have no social sense. She says I make people uncomfortable. And I want to say, Well, you make me uncomfortable when you tell me things like that, so maybe I got it from you.

(How to save a life, pg.15)

Narrative Voice:

Character voice is used as the narrative voice by Sara Zarr. Two conscious person are presented as the narrators. The narrator is no longer as unspecified entity, rather the narrator is more relatable and realistic character. In 'how to save a life' Jill Macsweeney's voice is a character voice. Her voice is so reliable because of her realistic expressions. Right from the beginning the readers are exposed to her physical and mental actions whereas Mandy in the other hand always leaves the reader with an anxiety. Who is she? Why is she been in such a situation? What is her plan? What does she need? For every question of the reader they are partially answered and have the feeling that something was hidden from them. So because of this we can say her voice of the second narrator is the unreliable voice.

Narrative time:

Isochrony is the discourse time which is identical with the story time. Here the story evolves in present tense and only in occasions flash backs are used to correlate the plot along with the happenings.

Still, I didn't cry. Instead, I dragged my big bag behind me in the snow and put the smaller one over my shoulder and walked...

(How to save a life, pg.13)

Jill gives me a look of disdain. All through the breakfast Jill reads a comic book. Trying to make conversation to show her I'm not mad about what she said to me,

(How to save a life, pg.119)

These lines shows how the story time and narration goes hand in hand. In Jill's narration we can see how she often refers to the past and compares it with the present. Dylan (Jill's boyfriend) and Jill loves one another but Jill is not ready to accept and enter into the relationship so as usual she starts comparing the situation with her lost dad.

Except I know love is possible, because I know my dad loved me and loved my mom. What I don't understand is how he learned to do that so well and what I'm going to do now that he's not here to show me. Maybe I can't do it. Maybe I don't have whatever it is takes.

(How to save a life, pg.92)

Analepsis: the analepsis technique is used efficiently in How to save a life without harming the flow of thoughts or the flow of narration. This flash back is used in the fiction to expose us -we the readers- the relationship Robin and Jill had with Mac and it helps us to understand Mandy's past life, her mom, her love with Christopher etc.

### Narrative Structure:

Sara Zarr had written the story in open structure. The reader's are left to wonder what happens next and make sense of it themselves. The story starts in a very moderate way gradually drawing the attention of the reader and progresses with a grip.

### Language:

The language of the narration is lucid and energetic. The flow of language never seems as a hindrance and lets the reader to travel along. Sentences are framed very effectively still in a simple understandable language. In most of the places the narrator uses precise sentences to convey a whole set of idea and message in the needed situation. For example Jill says to herself,

Obviously, I love my mom. Understanding, appreciating, showing kindness and compassion and basic friendliness, those are challenges.

(How to save a life, pg.04)

## 2.2 Selected fiction no.2 Diary of a wimpy kid by Jeff Kenny

### Narrative time:

Being a diary this book is divided into days and months. One could argue that the different months could be called chapters because the diary begins in September, when his mother gives it to him, and ends in May. In each month Greg writes the day of the week and then goes to describe what happened that day. Like any journal or diary writer, sometime Greg will skip a few days of writing, but he is mostly consistent. Greg is very creative so his personal and informal entries are always accompanied by cartoon drawings that illustrate what Greg has just described. The entries range from one big incident that happened at home or in school, or a few minor funny events that are worth noting. All the entries do relate to each other in the end, so if something is brought up, such as his brother's band Loded Diper, readers will be exposed to it later on in the book creating a coherent diary story. This type of narration is called pause.

### Point of View and Voice:

Diary of a Wimpy Kid is narrated by a young teenage boy is just beginning junior high. According to him, Greg is very truthful about what happened, but as readers we can see through Greg's biases and figure out what is really going on. Greg makes a big deal about events that are very important to him, which is funny because they seem very silly, but anyone who is or has been a young teenager laughs because we have all done and thought the same things. Greg simply narrates the daily events of school and family and how he feels about it, usually exaggerating, and his personality and description of everything is what is so funny. For example on the first page Greg begins his journal,

"First of all, let me get something straight: This is a JOURNAL, not a diary. I know what it says on the cover, but when Mom went out to buy this thing I SPECIFICALLY told her to get one that didn't say "diary" on it. Great. All I need is for some jerk to catch me carrying this book around and get the wrong idea. The other thing I want to clear up right away is that this was MOM's idea, not mine. But if she thinks I'm going to write down my 'feelings' in here or whatever, she's crazy. So just don't expect me to be all 'Dear Diary' this and 'Dear Diary' that."

(Diary of a wimpy kid pg., 2)

Even though Greg says he will not be "Dear Diary this" and "Dear Diary that" he does exactly that. Greg may not write his feelings in a sappy way, but uses more of a dramatic style where everything is a huge deal. He also blames his mom as the reason for writing the diary, but it is obvious that Greg enjoys his "journal" because if he didn't he would not be writing in it almost every day.

### Narrative Voice:

Greg's voice is quite distinct and unreliable because he portrays his life in such seriousness that it is funny. Things such as "the cheese touch," building the world's largest snowman, and being on Safety Patrol solely for hot chocolate are not life altering events, but they are events that make up his life and the voice he uses to portrays them keeping, us as readers, very interested. Being a diary, Greg is honest and does not hold anything back, which is appropriate for this genre of writing. His personality comes through his diary and we find ourselves relating to him. Narration-Greg narrates his life through his diary and can be very honest with the events in his life because no one will be reading it, but him. Through this personal narration we learn that Greg is picked on by bullies and his older brother, wants to be popular, feels that his younger brother is the favorite, and is loyal to his friend. Although Greg never tells us these things, by the way he narrates and describes every situation we can infer.

### Use of narrative language:

The vocabulary in this novel is not difficult to understand, but is rather simple and informal. However, one aspect of vocabulary that could be discussed is onomatopoeia. In the cartoons Greg draws, instead of describing the sound he just writes it. For example when an apple hits a girl on the head he uses the word "Clonk." Also what is interesting is when onomatopoeias are not used, instead of trying to create a panting sound Greg will just write "pant pant pant," "Grunt! Wheeze!" "Type type," instead of something like click click or my favourite he uses often is "gasp sputter." On the same page two people are lifting weights and one person says, "FPOOOO!" and the other person is described saying, "GASP SPUTTER."

### 2.3 Selected fiction no.03.Three mistakes of my life by Chetan Bhagat:

#### Narrative point of view;

Chetan's 'Three mistakes of my life' is his third novel which evolves around three friends from three religion who are interested in three different fields. I think this is not a coincidence but a commercial way of Chetan to make his readers to be attracted for a while and make me write such an opening statement as I wrote. Though he is not considered as a prominent writer still he is one of the well-known writer of India. Here am nowhere going to discuss on his subject or what he had provided this country as a writer. I am just going to discuss the narrative style adopted in his fiction. 'Three mistakes of my life' was written in first person narrative. Govind , he is the narrator of the whole story. From his perspective we could see the other characters and the progression of the story. He introduces us to the characters, plot and setting.

#### Narrative Voice:

The narrator is not biased, he accepts his mistakes and tries to be stable in making judgements and comments. The voice is reliable and acknowledging. The voice used is the character voice because the narrator is no more a separate identity and the narrator is one of the characters. Though he is the protagonist of the story his character is not as strong as Ishan. He seems to be like a minor character.

#### Narrative time:

The narrative time is in past tense. A flashback is a psychological phenomenon in which someone remembers a past experience. The whole story is a flash back told in Govind's voice.

#### Narrative structure:

The story is written in circular structure. The story starts in hospital where Govind narrates his past life and the reason for his suicide and the story comes to end in the very same hospital. This structure in narration is known as circular structure. The story begins like this ,

I tried, but found it difficult to be patient. I considered slapping him again. 'Listen,' I said, pitching my voice to the maximum allowed in a hospital. 'You chose to send your last mail to me. That means at a certain level you trusted me. I located you and flew out within hours of your mail. You still question if I care? A nurse came peeking into the room on hearing my loud voice. We became quiet. The clock showed midnight. (Three mistakes of my life, Chetan Bhagat, pg., 9)

We can see how the story begins in a hospital with Govind starting telling his story to Chetan and the story ends at the same setting.

The heart rate monitor beeped fast. Govind's pulse had crossed 130 beats a minute. The nurse came running inside. 'What did you do?' she said. 'I am fine. Just chatting,' Govind said.... Govind ended his story. I gave him a glass of water as his voice faltered..... I checked the time, it was five in the morning. I stepped outside the room. The early morning sunlight filled the hospital corridors.

(Three mistakes of my life, Chetan Bhagat, pg., 139)

Other than these elements we can see multiple framing in the plot. The three different lives of the friends and their family is one type of frame. Other than this political and religious conflict among people was also provided as another frame. Next to this educational system, cricket, friendship etc. to be set as other frames. Foreshadowing is one of the other technique used in this fiction. The introduction of political leaders and Omi's uncle spreads a tension in the story. In the course of time we can see how these issues create the twist in the story.

## CONCLUSION

By using these devices, writers avoid the need to state every piece of information they wish to convey. Instead, the literary devices give readers the opportunity to discover themselves the layers of meaning in a novel. Furthermore, there are so many areas for scope is found in the study of Narratology. Diverse genres of fiction are born in this contemporary literature. We can see Flash fiction, young adult fiction, New adult fiction and sci-fi genres evolving in literature expanding the multiverse of narration for the future readers.

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